Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 12 Number 1 January 2015

**FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 11th January 2015: Manjeera Barrage, Sangareddy, Medak District. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.**

Made up of several small islands, the Manjeera Bird Sanctuary is spread over 20 sq km and is nestled between the Manjeera and Singur barrages. A number of migratory and resident birds nest and breed here. Painted Storks, Herons, Wigeons, Teals, Cormorants, Pochards, Black and White Ibises, etc can be found here. A few Mugger crocodiles too call this sanctuary home. It is located 60km from Hyderabad.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms. Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

**INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Mr Ch. Venugopal, Director, Geological Institute of India, on "Insight into the world of Dinosaurs".**
**Tuesday, 6th January 2015, 6.30PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034.** (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Dinosaurs are giant reptiles that lived many millions of years back, and inspire a sense of awe whenever we talk about them. Their origins, life and extinction are enveloped in mystery. Mr Venugopal will share these and other interesting facts about the dinosaurs in his talk.

## Trip Report – Manjeera Barrage, 11th January 2015

Text: Ranjan Matthew; Photos: Hemant Kumar

**Rosy Starling**

The first official BSAP field outing of 2015 was at Manjeera Barrage, "a very popular spot with our birders" as Shafaat sir stated on the email to the group earlier this month. My expectations, along with those of several other birders I am sure, were already raised pretty high and I was up at the crack of dawn to meet the group at Panjagutta crossroads.

The drive to Manjeera Barrage is a long one, especially for Hyderabadis, who are mostly used to commuting in and around the city within a 6 to 7 km radius. The highway past Patancheru offered no easy drive even that early in the morning, all riddled with potholes and people driving on the wrong side. The promise of fruitful birdwatching, however, guided us all quickly and safely to our destination. On the dusty approach paths through the little village before the Manjeera Barrage, the convoy spotted several Rosy Starlings (*Sturnus roseus*) along the wires. Also spotted in the trees by the fields were several Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) and their nests, a pretty sight and testimony to their impressive weaving skills! Hovering and resting Black-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) were also seen along the way.

As the cars pulled up in the parking area of the Barrage, a bright yellow Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) was spotted hopping among the higher branches of the trees. Members all met and greeted each other in the early morning sunlight as we were pleasantly greeted by the Forest Dept. staff with a steaming hot breakfast and cups of tea. A welcome move and extremely kind of the Forest Dept. to organize a pre-birding energy boost in the wee hours!

After everyone had their fill of *puris* and *dal*, we went up to the barrage to see what we could see. The lake seemed to have a sparse population of birds nearer to the bund and dam where we were standing, but in the distance we could spot larger flocks of birds in and around the water. The BSAP Vanguard scope was quickly brought in to action and propped up for a better view. As the action picked up, several Pheasant-tailed (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) and Bronze-winged (*Metopidius indicus*) Jacanas were seen wading around the shallows at the far bank and one fellow gave us all quite a run for our money when we spent a long time debating what it could be! Our doubts were put to a cool rest by Hemant who affirmed it was a Juvenile Bronze-winged Jacana. Interesting to know that Krys's Field Guide doesn't illustrate this particular plumage with such a pronounced shade of orange on the breast of the bird. Also spotted in the initial hours were Purple (*Ardea purpurea*) and Grey (*Ardea cinerea*) Herons in the tall grass on the far banks. Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*) hunted the waters as Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) floated in the distance. All seemed well in the world of our feathered friends.

**Black-headed Cuckooshrike**

As the day moved on, much to the delight of the birdwatchers, the District Forest Officer, Mr. Shivaiah, and his staff, got the boat organized for members to go around the main island in the lake to get a clearer idea of the wildlife and ecosystem. This proved to be a real treat for everyone. Almost 80 Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*), 300+ Common Coots (*Fulica atra*), and about 95 Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) adorned the lake further away from the bund. Good numbers of Cotton Pygmy-goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) were spotted with flashing emerald-green wings as they flew. Our boatman skillfully pointed out a solitary Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) as it soared high overhead. Spot-billed Ducks were seen all around the lake in small groups, Little Cormorants were seen in hordes, and large fresh-water fish would jump out of the lake randomly. The lake was abuzz with action. In fact, the species that caused the most excitement, among young and old members alike, were the large and intimidating fresh-water crocodiles! Almost 7 or 8 were spotted snoozing with their mouths wide open in the bright daylight sun, recharging their batteries (as these beasts are cold-blooded). The largest of the lot, some 6 to 7 feet in length, caused several gasps on our boat, some even hinting she might have been a pregnant female. A very promising ecosystem had spread itself before our eyes and didn't cease to amaze and delight us.

Black-winged Kites tried their luck at hunting around the banks of the water body. Members enjoyed watching a Little Cormorant struggle with a fish much larger than it could swallow, and eventually it had to give it up. Common Pochards (*Aythya ferina*) with their copper-coloured heads were seen as well. Bigger raptors also graced the occasion, with a solitary Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) majestically scanning the banks, and a single Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), and Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur Indus*) were also seen during the course of the day. All through the day, however, plenty of River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) made their presence felt, gracefully swaying over the water looking for prey. Not in such great numbers, were a couple of Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*), which was an interesting spotting. Several Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) or 'Snake Birds' were also seen resting on the stray pieces of wood sticking out of the water.

**Greater Spotted Eagle**

Thanks to the extremely jovial, untiring, and accommodating Forest Dept. staff, all the members were able to go around the lake to observe the fantastic wildlife it had to offer, over almost 3 hours and 4 boat rides! 36 members in all turned up and approximately 28 species of birds were noted. All in all, it proved to be a highly exciting and informative day for all. We at the BSAP would like to extend our thanks to Mr. Shivaiah, DFO, and his staff for making excellent arrangements for us, and also to Mr. Ramakrishna Rao for helping us make this trip such a great success!

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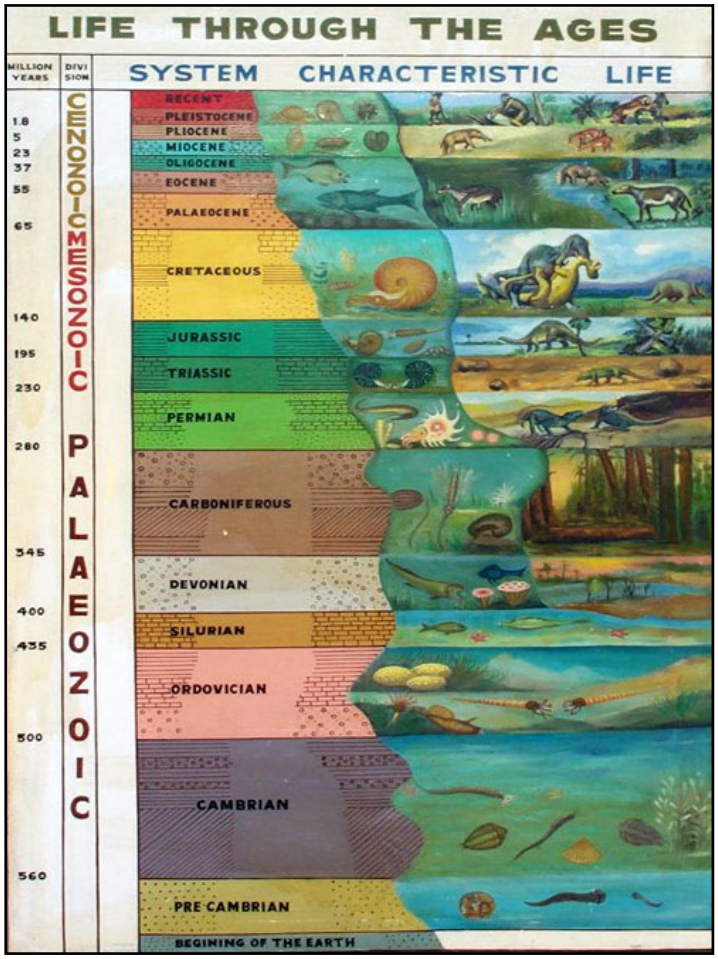
## Indoor Meeting – Talk on "An Insight into the World of Dinosaurs", 6th January 2015

Ch. Venugopal




Dinosaurs are giant reptiles with significant anatomical and physiological differences from the present day reptiles that lived in the Mesozoic period and became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous period. The life and extinction of the dinosaurs is surrounded by mysteries and interesting facts. The remains of dinosaurs are found as fossil record in the Mesozoic sediments all over the world, including India. The Indian dinosaurs are poorly studied compared to the Chinese and American counterparts. The ongoing research is revealing unexpected angles of their life habits etc. The birds are now considers to be the survivors of dinosaurs and possibly dinosaurs can be recreated by genetic engineering. The extinction of the dinosaurs is an equally enigmatic phenomenon, not explained satisfactorily so far. We humans have much to learn from the origin and extinction of the dinosaurs.

The dinosaurs evolved from a primitive archosaur reptile and diversified into various groups that consists of about 500 known species belonging to saurischians and ornithischians, the former are herbivores and carnivores with bipedal and quadrupedal gait, while the latter are herbivores with quadrupedal gait. The saurischians are classified into sauropods and theropods based on the leg anatomy. This dinosaur group became well diversified into 85 ft size brontosaurus to dinosaur as small as 16 inch microsaurus. The smaller raptors with feathers initially acquired for insulation gradually used them for giving lift while running. Slowly the feathers got further modified and the gliding motion started in the dinosaurs. During the course of evolution, which was non linear and asymmetrical, the true birds with powered flight have emerged to survive the great extinction due to the catastrophic event of the meteoric hit at the end of Cretaceous. Present research reveals that most of the dinosaurs were feathered. Now the scientists believe that dinosaurs can be grouped into avian dinosaurs and the non avian dinosaurs. The archaeopteryx is considered to be the missing link between birds and reptiles but the Chinese finds have now provided closer missing links between dinosaurs and birds.

**Archaeopteryx fossil remains indicating feathers**

**A view of dinosaur bones exposed during excavation showing ilium, femurii, humeii, scapula, cordcoid etc. at Adilabad**

**Dinosaur skeleton during reconstruction, Birla Science Centre, Hyderabad**

**Dinosaur skeleton after reconstruction, Birla Science Centre, Hyderabad**

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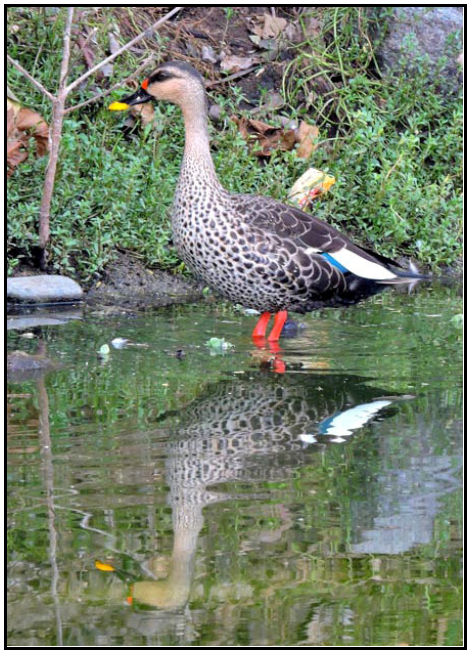
## Brief note on bird sightings around Indira Park

Text and photos: Gunbir Singh

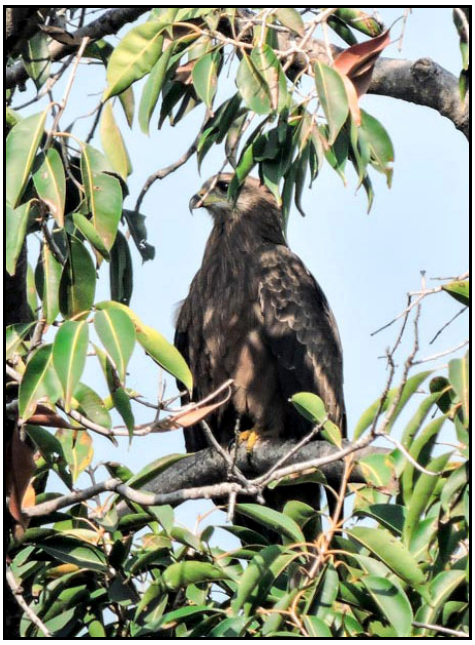
**Red-vented Bulbul**

Ever since I have joined BSAP & have come as close as possible to our feathered friends, my eyes are always looking around to spot any avian beauty if possible. One morning when I was sitting in my verandah sipping my morning tea, to my delight I spotted a pair of Red-vented Bulbuls. I ran inside for my camera and was lucky to capture an image before they took flight.



**Spot-billed Duck**

From then on, my customary cup of morning tea is never without camera at hand. My camera has also become my faithful partner on my morning walks so that I can stop and capture any feathered fascination behind the lens. One morning at Indira Park I spotted a large bird landing in the lake and clicked the photos of a Spot-billed Duck, and also spotted a raptor sitting on the tree, which turned out to be a Black Kite.



**Black Kite**

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## Bird of the Month

Text and photos: Umesh Mani

# Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)

**Ashy Drongo**
(Ankola, Karnataka, 05-02-2012)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Dicruridae
Genus: *Dicrurus*
Species: *D. leucophaeus*
Size: 29 cm

Description &distribution: The Ashy Drongo, a member of the drongo family Dicruridae, is mainly ashy- to dark-grey, with crimson irises, a long, deeply-forked tail and, in some sub-species, a white patch around the eye, or white markings on the head. The underparts may be dull or somewhat glossy dark-grey, while the upperparts are slate-grey. Juvenile birds are brownish in colour. Since the grey colouration is very variable, a more reliable diagnostic feature is the absence of the white rictal spot at the base of the bill (as opposed to the Black Drongo, where the white rictal spot is present).

The Ashy Drongo is widely distributed across South and South-east Asia, from eastern Afghanistan across the Himalayas to southern China and Indonesia. It breeds in the Himalayas and the north-east Indian hills, and winters in the plains of peninsular India and Sri Lanka. The sub-species found across the Himalayas is *D. l. longicaudatus* (which includes *D. l. beavani,* described by Charles Laurie), whereas *D. l. hopwoodi* is found in the eastern Himalayas, which becomes *D. l. mouhouti* in Thailand and Myanmar. The northern part of the range has *D. l. leucogenis* and *D. l. salangensis,* both of which migrate south, including to Nagaland, and the south of the range has *D. l. bondi.* The south-east Asian islands have several insular populations (*D. l. periophthalmus, D. l. batakensis, D. l. phaedrus, D. l. siberu,* and *D. l. nigrescens*). Java, Bali, Simalur, Lombak, Palawan and the Balabac Islands are said to have the nominate race.

Behaviour: The Ashy Drongo is usually found singly, in pairs or in small groups, though small flocks may fly together during migration. It has short legs, and is usually seen perched high on a tree, on electric wires or other prominent spots. It sometimes loos for food on tree trunks, but usually gathers its insect diet through aerial sallies. The call is a *drangh-gip* or *gip-gip-drangh*, but it can imitate the calls of other birds, including the melodious whistling of the Common Iora.

Nesting: The Ashy Drongo breeds from May to June. The nest is usually a loose cup in forks of tree trunks or branches. The eggs are reddish or brown in colour. The usual clutch is three to four eggs.

Local name: The Ashy Drongo is known as *'budidarangu aitrinta'* in Telugu, *'erattai valan kuruvi'* in Tamil (a name also used for the Black Drongo and the White-bellied Drongo), and *'kakka thampooran'* in Malayalam.

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